



A graphic novel by
ARNOLD ARRE

HALINA FILIPINA

**A New Yorker
in Manila**



TUTTLE



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TUTTLE Publishing

Tokyo | Rutland, Vermont | Singapore

Published by Tuttle Publishing, an imprint of Periplus Editions (HK) Ltd.

www.tuttlepublishing.com

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2022931223

ISBN 978-0-8048-5544-0; ISBN 978-1-4629-2331-1 (Ebook)

25 24 23 22
8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in Singapore
2203TP

Distributed by:

North America, Latin America & Europe

Tuttle Publishing

364 Innovation Drive, North Clarendon,

VT 05759-9436 U.S.A.

Tel: 1 (802) 773-8930

Fax: 1 (802) 773-6993

info@tuttlepublishing.com

www.tuttlepublishing.com

Asia Pacific

Berkeley Books Pte Ltd

3 Kallang Sector #04-01

Singapore 349278

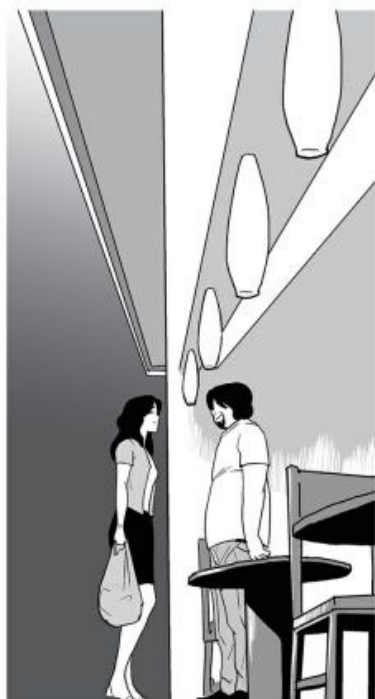
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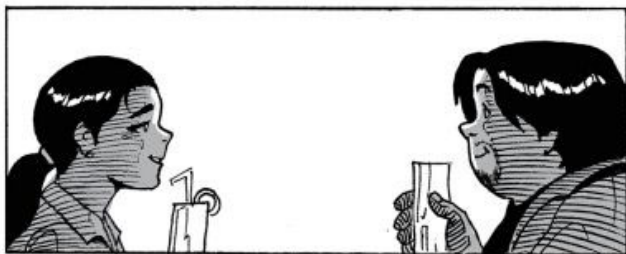
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"The identity of the Filipino today is of a person asking what is his identity."

– Nick Joaquin, *Culture and History*

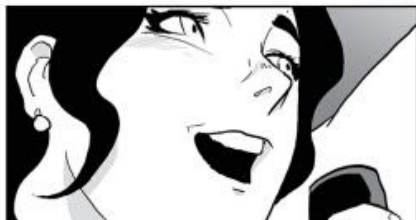
Introduction



One of the best pieces of advice I've ever heard was from Tom Kelley of IDEO during his talk for Stanford's *Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders* series. He said that one of the ways to stay innovative was to "think like a traveler." He noted that when you visit another country as a tourist, you are immediately aware of the unique little things about that place that the locals have probably taken for granted: the way people greet each other on the street, the proper etiquette when entering a house, table manners, the design tropes of their advertising. Kelley says that if one keeps that mindset no matter where you are, you become sensitive to all the little things that make society work and are in a better position to find solutions to make it better.

This idea of "thinking like a traveller", I believe, is what makes Arnold Arre one of the most innovative Filipino comic creators of our time. Many Filipino comics try to highlight their Filipino identity by relying mainly on visual and verbal cues that come dangerously close to caricature, like having superheroes with design elements of the Philippine flag in it, or wearing a salakot or a barong. Others use Philippine mythology or history as their mark of being Filipino, no doubt following in the footsteps of Arnold himself who pioneered this

particular genre with his award-winning graphic novel *The Mythology Class* back at the start of the millennium. Yet many of them still fail to capture that feeling of authenticity and sincerity with their stories, creating Westernized superheroes or manga story clones draped in Philippine clichés or spouting Taglish dialogue. But when you read any of Arnold's works set in the Philippines, the characters and the settings genuinely feel Filipino. They feel like they are set in very specific parts of the Philippines from very specific parts of society. The way the characters talk, their body language, the distinct background details that pepper the setting of every scene, they all contribute to making the stories feel genuine. Filipinos who read it will feel right at home, and those from other countries will swear they've just taken a virtual Philippine vacation. And yet Arnold's stories don't just mimic and recreate Philippine culture and society. His stories comment on them and subtly



try to reshape them into something better. I believe he is able to achieve this because he "thinks like a traveller" and notices all these little quirks and nuances about our lives as Filipinos that most of us have become numb to. He takes them and crafts them into a narrative experience that entralls us with seemingly little effort, like an artist transforming street junk into multi-million dollar sculptures.

Halina Filipina is probably one of my favorite Arnold Arre stories so far. One reason is that I'm a sucker for romantic slice-of-life stories, so this just hits me in all the right places. But it's also a story about two people meeting in the Philippines: Halina, a traveller and who is discovering just what the Philippines has to offer, and Cris, a local who is all-too familiar with the country and perhaps even a little bit sick of it. With any other author, it would be a nice set-up for a simple comedic romance. But Arnold uses his traveller's thinking in telling this story, making us reflect on the concepts of identity, of both pride and shame towards our country and ourselves, and how all that ties into the way we feel about those closest to us. It's a graphic novel that feels simultaneously comfortable yet also challenging. Only an author as observant and as skillful as Arnold could tackle such themes in such a subtle, entertaining, and heart-filling manner.

So as you turn the page, be prepared to see the Philippines through the eyes of Halina and Cris. Be prepared to see a little bit of yourself as well in them. And in both cases, I guarantee you'll find something familiar, yet also something unexpected and new. That's what happens when you travel with Arnold Arre.

Jamie Bautista
Alabang 2015

"Arnold's stories don't just mimic and recreate Philippine culture and society. His stories comment on them and subtly try to reshape them into something better."



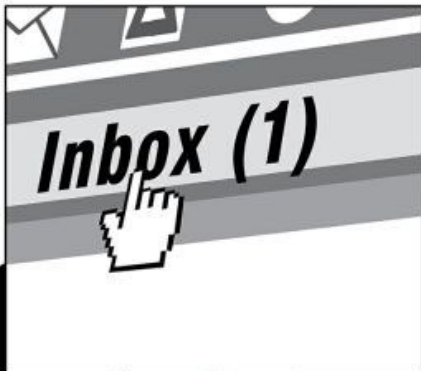


P R E S E N T D A Y









Hey Cris!

It took a long time to find them, but as promised, here they are. Consider it a gift ;)

*Best regards,
Bryan*



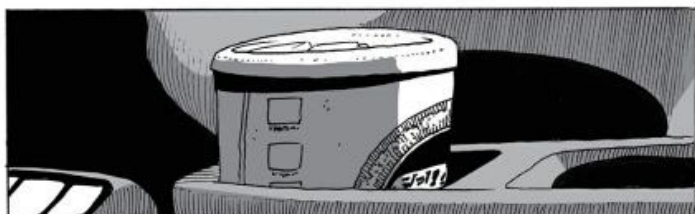


F E B R U A R Y 2 0 0 2

Chapter 1
The Meeting

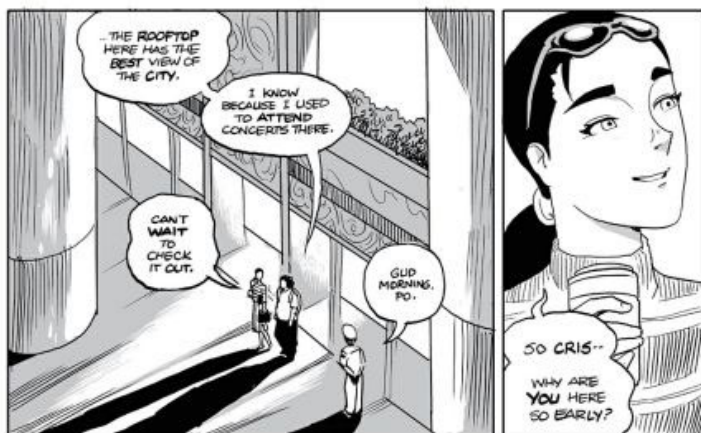


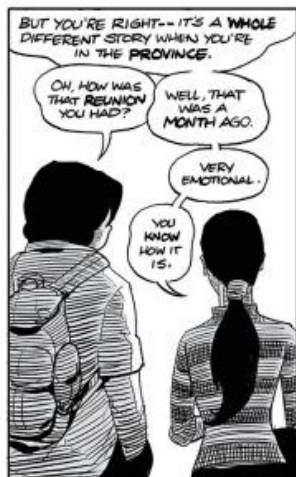






























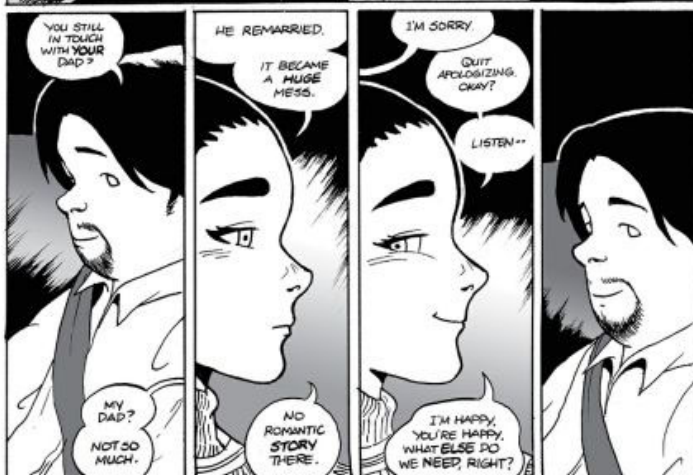


Chapter 2
Manila Nights



















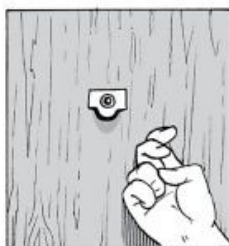






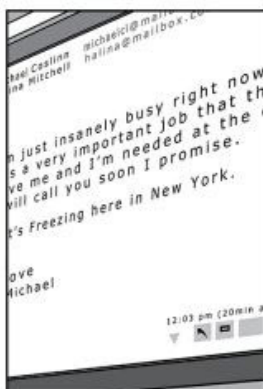










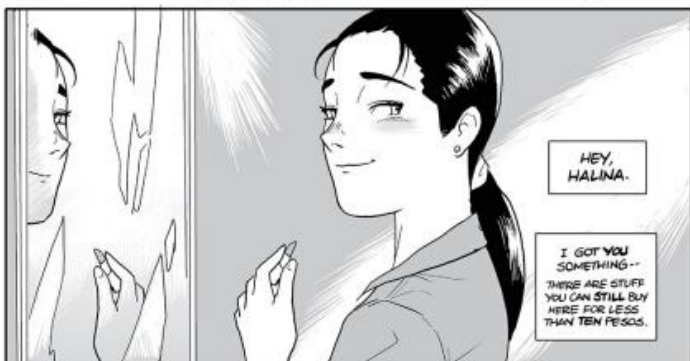


Chapter 3
The Unspoken Language



























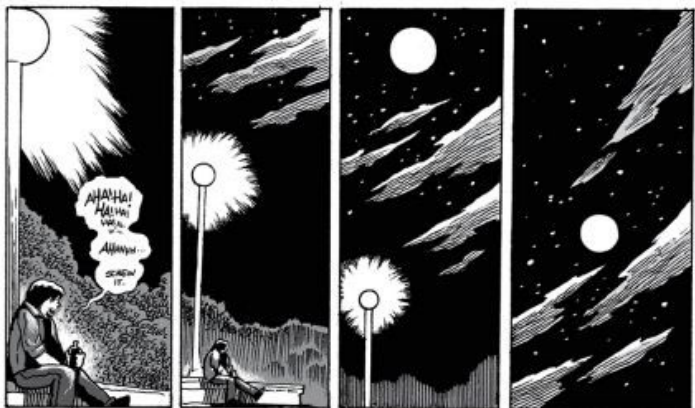
















Chapter 4
Connections













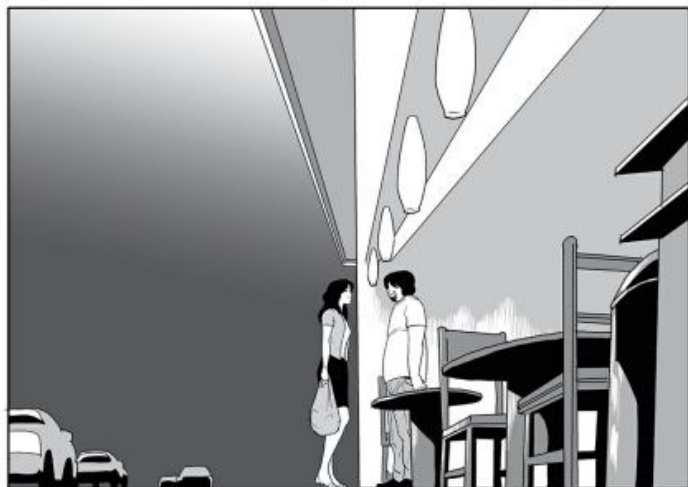






































Pasensya na...



Kung ako ay naiiyak.



Mahabaw lang talaga ang luha ko.



'Di ko mapigil

JUST
CAN'T
FIGHT...

...ang aking damdamin...

...THIS
FEELING
IN ME...

...puwede ba umalis ka na...

PLEASE
JUST
LEAVE.

...tumutunog na ang beeper mo.

YOUR
PAGER'S...

...UM...

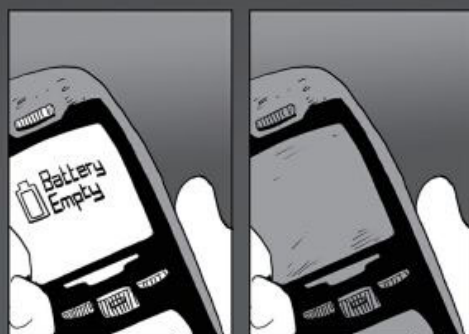
BEEPING?

SOUNDING?

RINGING?









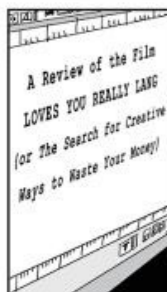
















Chapter 5
All Mixed Up













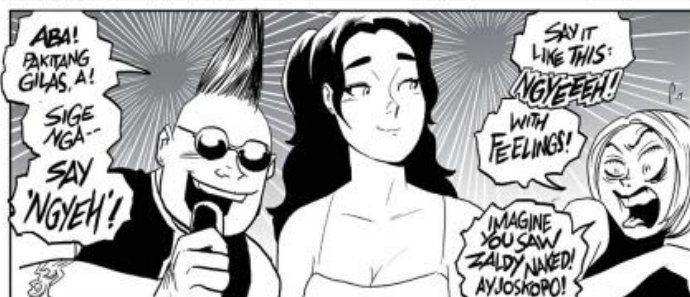












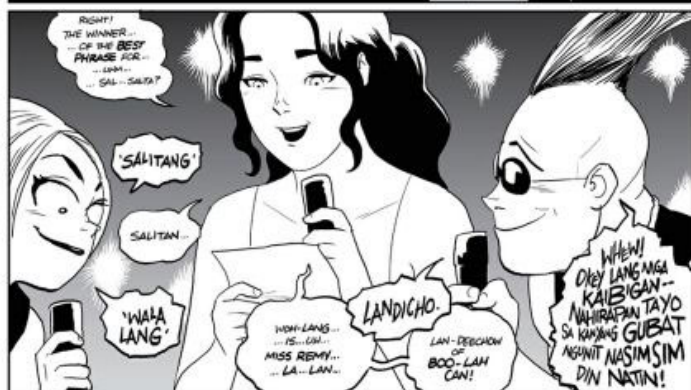
HAAAAHAHAHAHAHAHA!





















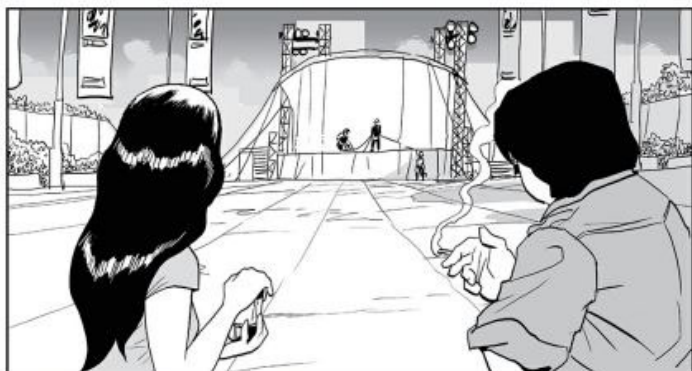






Chapter 6
Lost Signal











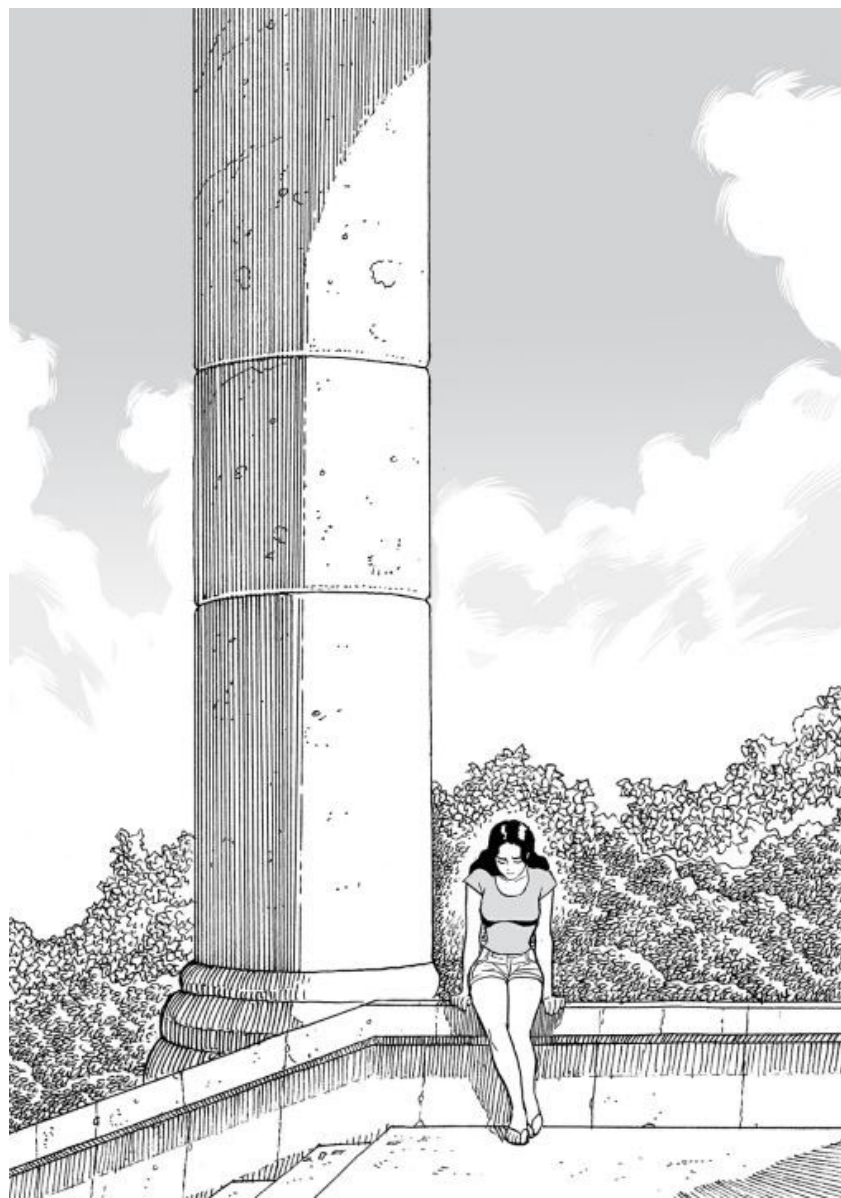












Chapter 7
Thoughts Of You

























'YOU'VE
BEEN TO
SOHO?'





































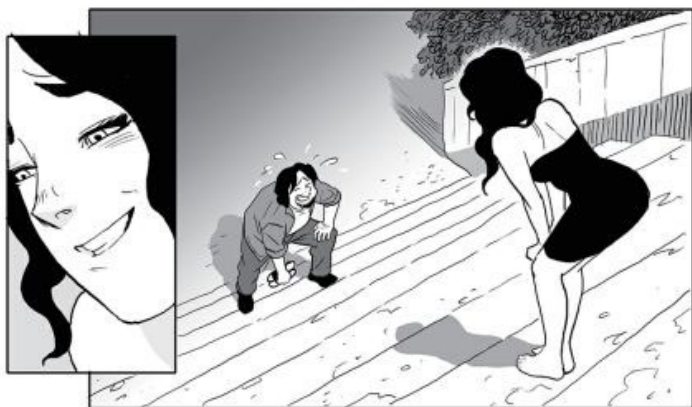












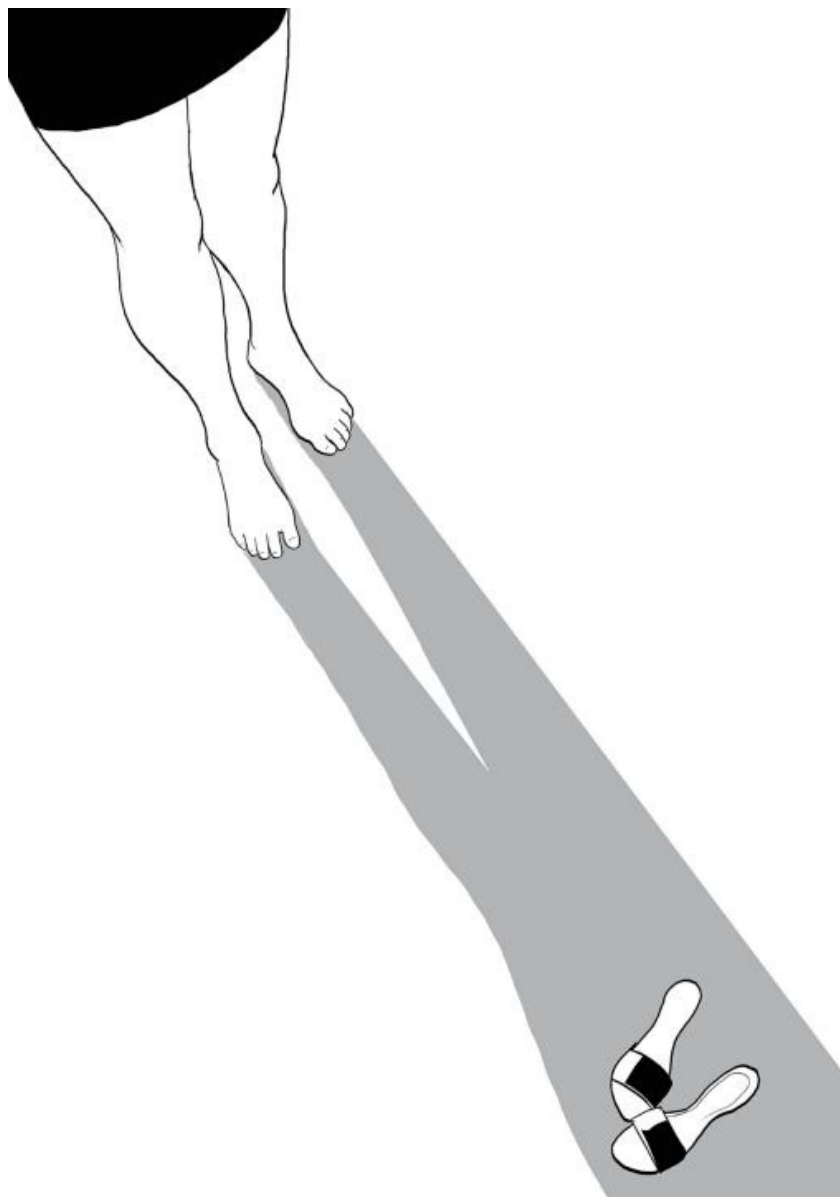








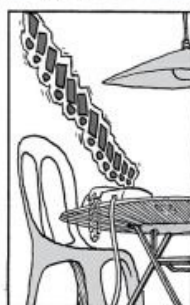
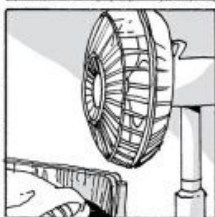


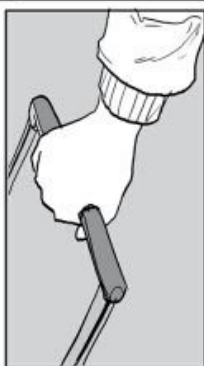












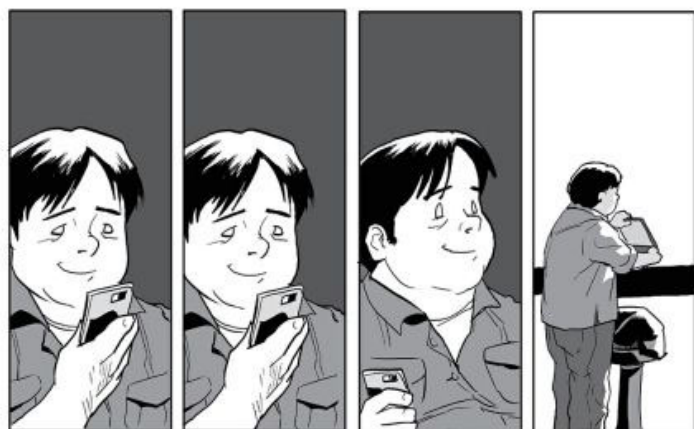


Chapter 8

The Right Words

























Hello. Again.

Notes on Halina Filipina's 13-year journey

Halina Filipina was written in the hot summer of 2002 and was completed in three months. I disciplined myself in to fulfilling a modest page count of one hundred because I have a tendency to go overboard. I wanted it to be a no-frills relationship story, something cozy compared to my other works *The Mythology Class* and *After Eden*. No interweaving subplots here – just two people realizing their differences and falling in love despite them. There's a lot of beauty to be found in stories that are simple – simple but not ordinary. I found working on one to be a delightful experience since I also didn't have to worry about drawing many pages with a big cast of characters.

And so the original *Halina Filipina* graphic novel was completed... but later on shelved. For 13 years.

Missed Opportunity

I can only think of two reasons for having kept *Halina Filipina* hidden for so long. To me, releasing yet another romance story following "After Eden" would be too predictable and maybe even a bit self-indulgent. I was also very interested in creating an edgy Filipino super power book at the time. I wanted something different and it manifested in *Andong Agimat*. Andong provided a complete contrast to the clean visage of Jon and Celine and the stuff they had to go through in their seemingly problem-free lives. For that reason, the

Below: Panels from the original "Halina Filipina" graphic novel in 2002. Here, Halina owns a clothing store inside the mall where she first meets Cris. I discarded this idea and opted for her just having a limited stay in the Philippines.





story of the talisman-wearing Fernando Asedillo, the vigilante who lives in a crime-riddled Manila, became my third novel.

The other reason was *Halina* itself. After rereading the book – the simple relationship story that I thought would be interesting, the novel with the modest

Above: Originally, I intended for Cris to be working in a fast food joint where, between breaks, he would write his film reviews.

page-count – felt completely flat. 2002 was a turning point for me as an artist. There were many issues that I wanted to tackle, from Filipino society to politics to world problems and, later on, my own problems. There were more things I wanted to talk about but I ignored the opportunity. Simplifying something for the sake of it didn't work. Instead of shouting at things that pissed me off, I went for the polite whisper. Without the political and societal issues to set a backdrop for the story, *Halina* and *Cris* were just two people eating, talking, maybe arguing a bit. And then one leaves and it all ends. I might have just as well trapped them inside an elevator and the story would've been more interesting. I guess not even having a "cozier" page count could salvage what became an ordinary tale.



Left: Part of an unused page from the original book showing a flashback of Halina at age 12.



Above: The original scene where Halina first encounters the term "Halo-Halo."

Endings and Beginnings

Some of the initial ideas I had in *Halina* spilled over to *Martial Law Babies*, the novel I would release six years later in 2008. For you who've read it, you probably noticed some similarities, especially with Carol's showbiz baptism of fire which was a fate more cruel than what Halina experienced (lucky her!). Also, Bertrand Faustino Jr., the film critic in that novel is none other than Cris using a pen name – one of my little attempts at a crossover between my books.

The trials of Allan's barkada and all the craziness that ensued – the media

bombardment, stories of corruption filling the headlines, and his friends leaving for greener pastures mirrored what I saw happening around me. However, unlike in 2002, this time I had something to say. Overall, I was very satisfied with *Martial Law Babies*. In fact, Allan's barkada mirrored Nicole's in *The Mythology Class*. Only this time in stead of them enco untering engkantos, the monsters were in the guise of unfulfilled dreams and lost friendships – real problems we face everyday.

But between working on novels and the occasional graphic design projects

Below: Halina was supposed to have spent most of her childhood in California. This panel shows her visiting New York City for the first time.





(and soon, animation projects), I would find myself scanning through pages of *Halina Filipina* and noticing how relaxing, almost calming, the book was with its minimal line work and with just the two characters moving the story along. I suddenly remembered how fun it was working on a book about a Fil-Am girl who just wanted to know what being Filipino is all about. Plain and simple.

That excited reaction I had towards the character was also shown by the audience during my Pecha Kucha talk in June of this year where I showed everyone two pages from the unreleased work – the scene were Halina steps out in a saya dress. Seeing their reactions was enough to make me re-evaluate the entire book.

Like Meeting Old Friends

Now the new *Halina Filipina* is complete – reworked, redrawn and streamlined. You are holding a book that went through many changes and, at least to me, looks and reads so unlike

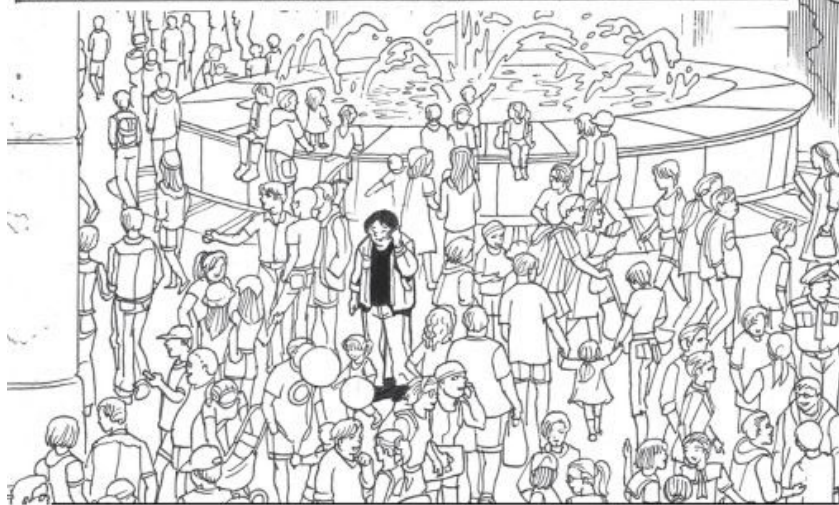
Above: Cris trying to be a gentleman, helping Halina with her shopping.

the previous draft. I would compare this feeling to that of visiting your old town and finding it not looking anything like how you remember it. However, the landmarks are still there. And so are the people. Much like Halina and Cris whose looks have changed since the original draft but are still the same characters I knew so well. Returning to the book and working on it again felt like meeting old friends. Your outlook has changed through the years – you're wiser and more experienced and so are they. Yet somehow they still have the charm and certain qualities that endeared them to you the first time.

And suddenly all those years seem like they never happened. Yes, even when 13 years have passed.

Hello, again

And what of the ending? By following Halina and Cris' story as it unfolded, it was very clear to me – especially near the second act – that their relationship,



however sweet it may be, should eventually come to a complete halt as a result of the external forces at play; that the two will have to be content knowing that the closest they can ever get to being intimate would have to be calling or texting each other.

The original ending went something like this: after about a year since Halina's departure, we find Cris in the same mall where they meet in Chapter 1. Cris then

Above: The original ending was set inside the mall.

receives a call from a strange number. He picks up and goes through the "hello, again" bit which hints that it's Halina making the call without the need to show her. The two talk as more and more people enter the scene, leading to a final full page where Cris is surrounded by the crowd but is oblivious of it. The emotion in that scene suited the story.

That approach was one that I wanted to keep for the new ending, except that instead of setting it in the old mall, I moved Cris to Washington Square. And instead of a strange number calling, it is apparently Halina who set the meeting.

There was temptation to completely change the ending and see where the new direction goes, but I guess keeping it was my way of giving my old 2002 self a break. It still works for me anyway, and ultimately the book's original theme when I first thought of it years ago stays the same. It's about Halina's attempt to find her roots and Cris' willingness to help her – the result being both resignation and hope. I say resignation because Halina decided that the Philippines wasn't really for her and never truly found her Pinoy self. But then there's a sense of hope when we see her wearing the rattan hat that Cris gave her. In fact, everything that Cris

and Halina built to strengthen their relationship during that short period of time is represented by that hat – a tiny piece of our culture on top of Halina's head, keeping her warm on a freezing New York afternoon.

I'm glad that this book finally got the chance to be published, read and, hopefully, enjoyed, thanks to Nautilus Comics. It's a very personal story and I'm happy to share it. And this time, unlike with Nicole, Jon, Allan and even Andong, there are no huge barkadas in the picture.

After all *Halina Filipina* is just a cozy story about two friends talking, learning from one another, and sharing the quiet surroundings. Which is fine by me.

Arnold Arre
Quezon City 2015



Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks first and foremost to Cyn who loves everything about my work more than anyone else and for being the most patient person in the universe. To my family—Leonardo & Nancy Arre, Leslie & Aurora Bauzon, Lenn, Ate Ruby, Gian, Jing, Gladys, Calvin, Inches for being my favorite people.

This book wouldn't even have been made if not for Jamie & Iyay Bautista and Nautilus Comics who placed their complete trust in me.

Big big thanks to you both!

I owe a great deal of gratitude to Buddy & Earnest Zabala for always believing in me and for being such trusted friends all these years.

A big thank you to Emil Flores & Robert Magnuson who, since Baguio in 1995, taught me the value of telling fictional stories to bring sense in a mad world.

Special thanks to Gerry & Ilyn Alanguilan for giving me the chance to experience the strange but fun world of "Rodski Patotski," and for keeping the Pinoy comic book reader interested in the classics.

To Karen Kunawicz, Yvette Tan, Dino Ignacio, Marco Dimaano, Leinil Yu, Manix Abrera, Ed Tadeo, and the magnificent Whilce Portacio – thank you for your creativity that keeps inspiring me.

Thank you Jerrold Tarog for your wonderful films and for restoring my faith in Philippine Cinema.

Marie Jamora, Quark Henares, Ramon de Veyra and Neva Talladen. I am indebted to you guys for your friendship, creativity, and support.

To Ely Buendia, what would this generation be – in fact what would this entire nation be without your awe-inspiring music? And along with Buddy Zabala, Marcus Adoro and Raymund Marasigan of the Eraserheads, you have all done us proud with your brilliance.

To RA Rivera, Ramon Bautista, Jun Sabayton, Jr. and Lour de Veyra for their wit, wisdom and humor that always entertains.

Thank you Mike De Leon, Clodualdo Del Mundo Jr., Cesar Hernando, and Mark Gil whose genius I have, with great sincerity and love, paid tribute to in this book.

And finally, to Luis Katigbak, the first person to have read the original *Halina Filipina* graphic novel in 2002, whose opinion and thoughts I value so much. Thank you for writing stories that inspire.

Credits

Pages 46 to 47: scene loosely based on the film *Batch 81* (1982) Directed by Mike de Leon, screenplay by Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr., art direction by Cesar Hernando, starring Mark Gil. Used with permission.

Pages 83 to 85: from the song *Torpedo* by the Eraserheads from the album *Cutterpillow* (1995), written by Ely Buendia. Used with permission.



About the Author

Arnold Arre lives in Quezon City with his wife Cynthia and their marmalade cat Abby. He's been drawing & writing comics for more than 20 years and is also currently honing his skills as an animator.

Visit www.arnold-arre.com

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THE MYTHOLOGY CLASS

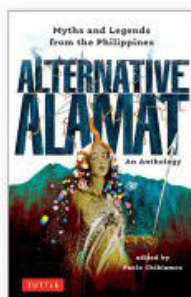
TRIP TO TAGAYTAY

MARTIAL LAW BABIES

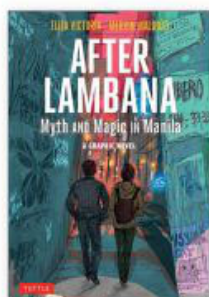
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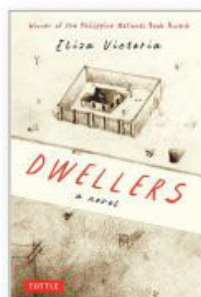
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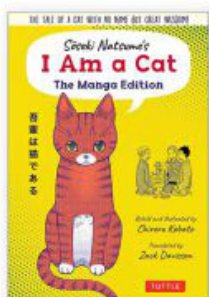
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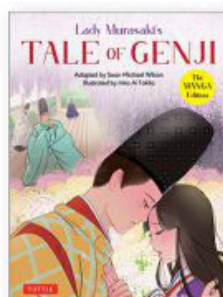
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In a cross-cultural collision, a New Yorker discovers love among the locals!

When Halina Mitchell makes her first trip to Manila, the eye-opening immersion in her homeland turns all her assumptions on their head. With the film critic Cris as her guide, she's given a vivid glimpse of a teeming city few others get to see. Will her growing affections include the irreverent writer? Captured in Arnold Arre's distinctive style, *Halina Filipina* is about finding one's place in the world—or in two worlds at once!

ARNOLD ARRE won the inaugural graphic novel Filipino National Book Award in 2000 for *The Mythology Class*. He is the creator of *Martial Law Babies*, *After Eden*, *Ang Mundo Ni Andong Agimat*, *Trip to Tagaytay* and the acclaimed *Children of Bathala* series.



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